



The Effect of Youth Unemployment on Democratization Process in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Democracy and unemployment among youth are two antithetical bed-fellows. Unemployment hinders the progress and development of democracy in any country, be it developed or a developing one. The young, vibrant and energetic are important resources that should not be left idle for a democratic experiment to thrive. Thus, the youth have been the bane of Nigeria's democracy since inception in 1999. Hence, becomes a cog in the wheel of democratic processes where it manifests itself in a myriads of serious socio-economic and political crises such as pipeline vandalism, political thuggery, kidnappings, prostitution and insurgency to mention a few. It is against this background that, this paper attempts to look at youth unemployment in relation to Nigeria's democracy by using conflict theory as a basis for explanation. However, it is suggested that reducing youth unemployment is critical to the growth and development of Nigeria's democracy as well as its stability.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Employment, Nigeria, Unemployment, Youth.

Introduction

Youth are the greatest assets any nation can be proud of (Zango, 2015) and they play a significant role in a democratic experiment when they are fully positively and engaged. Thus, youth unemployment hinders the progress of and development of a nation as well as becoming a source of devastating social tension and conflict. The youth are young, energetic, vibrant and an important resource that should not be left idle especially in a democratic setting. As Zango (2015) succinctly observed, youth as a social category constitutes a large proportion of the Nigerian population, constituting 53,552,331 amounting to about 38.1%. According to the Nigerian Youth Policy, youth are defined to be a group of individuals aged between 15-35 years.

In historical terms, the Nigerian unemployment problem as opined by Ojo (1998) emerged around 1960s, because it was virtually non-existent in the 1950s. This is for the fact that over-employment of

143,000 was made up of children below legal working age was recorded in the 1952/53 population census (Diejomah and Orimalade, 1971). According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (2003), the national unemployment rate rose from 4.3% in the 1970 to 6.4% in 1980. The high rate of unemployment observed in the 1980s was largely linked to the depression in the Nigerian economy during the late 70s. According to Ojo (1998) the 1976 unemployment rate of 4.3% was low, he ascribed to the oil boom of the decade. Secondly, aggregate as well as urban and rural unemployment rate were relatively high during second half of 1980. This was as result of worsening economic environment which followed the oil boom and the subsequent introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. Thirdly, unemployment rate have always been higher in urban areas due to rural urban migration. According to Labour Force Survey conducted by the Federal Office of Statistics in December 1997, Nigeria has a composite unemployment rate which stood at 3.2% compared with 3.4% in the corresponding period of 1996 (F.O.S, 2001). Similarly, the urban and rural unemployment rates declined from 6.1% and 2.8% in December 1996 to 6.0% and 2.6% in December 1997. The composite registered unemployment for December 1998 stood at 3.2% but declined to 3.1% in 1999, where as the urban unemployment rate in December 1998 was 4.9% but increased to 2.5% in December 1999. In December 2000, the composite unemployment rate increased to 4.7% similarly the urban and rural unemployment rates increased to 7.2% compared to the previous years. However, Nigerian unemployment rate increased to 23.9% in 2011 compared with 21.1% in 2010 (NBS, 2011). It is therefore interesting to note that the NBS (2011) reported that the rate of unemployment is higher in the urban areas with 26.6% as against that of rural areas which indicated only 17.1%. One of the causes of unemployment as argued by Fadayomi (1992) was the inability to develop and utilize the nation's manpower resources effectively, especially in the rural sector. This however,



resulted in the high rate of urbanization and an increasing number of youth migrating to urban areas seeking to get greener pastures thereby leaving agriculture to the aged (Usoro, 1997).

It is against this background that after the introductory part of this paper the second part involves an attempt to translate the concept of youth while the third deals with theoretical analysis. The fourth segment of the paper deals in describing democracy, the youth and unemployment while the fifth part views the youth as political thugs and this ends with a recommendation and a conclusion.

The Youth

Zango (2015:234) is of the view that youth is considered to be the time of life between childhood to adulthood. To this effect, the concept of youth has therefore defied a universal acceptability as it is most upon seen to be just a social construct depending on the circumstances or environment in which it is being translated. This is as a result of the fact that the age group yardstick varied. In Nigeria, the country's 2001 National Youth Policy adopts a similar upper-tier benchmark of 35 years, but the lower-tier age is 18 years (Zango, 2015:235). The choice of 18 as the point of entry into youth-hood aligns with the country's minimum voting age. In Niger and Mali, 'youth' covers persons between 14 and 30 years, and 15 and 40 years, respectively (Isma'il, W. et al, 2009:24). According to Dalhatu (cited in Zango, 2010) the definition of youth varies not only across countries but across agencies. For instance, the World Bank opined the term "youth" to refer to those who are between the ages of 15-35, the Commonwealth Youth Programme viewed it as those people aged between 15-29. It can be observed that the definition given by the World Bank is synonymous to the one assumed by the National Youth Policy of Nigeria. Here, note is necessary of the fact that youth is a term used for people of both genders i.e male and female of young age. Sanusi (2010:1) argued that the 'National Youth Policy' posited that youth are the foundation of a society whose energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation. Through the creative talents and labor power of the youth, a nation makes a giant stride in economic development and socio-political attainments. However, in a situation whereby the youth become neglected, marginalized and completely abandoned by the state, there emerged a lot of tendencies of insubordination to the system which manifest in various dimensions. This is as Sambo (2007:56) posits that youth in search of

independence often take the form of struggle against authority and discipline which result in rebellious and destructive behaviors like delinquency, deviance, thuggery, cultism, hooliganism, alcoholism and other social vices. These criminal tendencies and unemployment among youth, coupled with the kind of politics being played by the Nigerian politicians, pose a great threat to the socio-economic and political advancement of the society which eventually shake the most needed peaceful co-existence of the social formation.

Unfortunately, Nigerian youth have nowadays become a threat to the socio-economic and political development of their country due to the nature of hardship occasioned by unemployment they found themselves, especially after the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 by I.B.B administration and the Economic Reform Policies of beginning of 2000 (Kano, 2008:9). This has been buttressed by Sanusi (2010:2) where he observed that the Nigerian youth are a group of people, whose opportunities for self empowerment and development have been seriously ignored and limited due to negligence and unfriendly policies, resulting to youth restiveness in some cases.

Theoretical Analysis

Conflict theory is the theoretical approach in social sciences that views social phenomena as a result of conflict between individuals or groups. It has developed at both micro and macro levels studies individuals, and from his or her behavior seeks to draw inferences about collective behavior, and how conflict of interest emerge and become the driving force upon which social relations are built. The theory maintained that society or organization functions so that individual participants and their associated groups struggle to maximize benefits. The theory is mostly applied to explain conflict between social classes, proletarian versus bourgeoisies, and in ideologies such as capitalism. (Marshall, 1998): "Conflict theory emphasized the importance of interest over norms and values, and the ways which the pursuit of interests generated various types of conflict as normal aspect of social life, rather than abnormal or dysfunction occurrences"

The main ideas of conflict theory can be summarized thus:

- a. Focus on conflict is an inevitable part of social life.
- b. Societies are characterized by inequality thus there is an emphasis on the role of competition in producing conflict.



- c. Conflict is not necessarily a negative aspect of society since it produces social change.
- d. Societies comprised of dominant and subordinate groups which compete for resources, the haves and the have nots.

Generally speaking, the defining characteristic of any society from a conflict perspective is inequality. For example, Marxist argued that economic inequality is at the heart of all societies. The following are four primary assumptions of modern conflict theory;

1. Competition over scarce resources (money, leisure, sexual partners) is at the heart of all social relationship. Competition rather than consensus is the characteristic of human relationship.
2. Structural inequality Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.
3. Revolution Change occurs as a result of conflict between competing interests rather than through adaptation. It is often abrupt and revolutionary rather than evolutionary.
4. Even war is a unifier of the societies involved, as well as war may set an end to the whole societies.

In considering the above four assumptions of conflict theory, we tend to believe that all the assumptions are the tools that will increase unemployment in the societies, this is because the theory accepts conflict and inequality as normal in human relationships, which eventually divides the members of the society into the haves and the have nots, and will leave the have nots with no option rather than to sell their labour for wages. But in Nigeria, today the government does not have adequate arrangement for the have nots segments; so that they can sell their labour for wages therefore they will sink into the circle of unemployment.

Conflict theory explains unemployment as an outcome of the conflict between capital and labour over distribution of the results of production. The outcome is dependent on the power of employees versus employers. This theory emphasizes the importance of collective action and the role of left parties when in power working to maintain full employment through macro-economic policy. Increased bargaining power of capital resulting from its potential for mobility and reduced support of labour unions can thus explain increases in

unemployment after the oil-boom in 1970s. These developments opened windows of opportunity for a major policy change (Korpi 2001). Further complicating this approach focusing on political factors in explaining unemployment is on involving another potential conflict between insiders and outsiders in the labour market: The more security for the insiders, the greater the penalty of being out (Kerr, 1954).

The single most important element in conflict theory for Marx is the concept of class. Whereas contemporary sociologists sometimes use the term social class to refer to the relative ranking of individuals on such dimension as education or income, class for Marx referred to basic structural components of a society as a whole. The class structure of a particular society is determined by the system of economic production that exists in that society at a given point in history. That is, the division of different segments of the population into classes ultimately depends on their respective relationship of ownership versus non ownership of the existing means of production. In the case of capitalist economies, the means of production are the factories, machines and financial resources used in manufacture of material goods to be sold for profit. Nigerian situation is worsened, because factories are closed down as a result of many factors such as inadequate power supply, multiple taxations and government policies, this situation has worsened the problem of unemployment in the country.

In view of this Marx further argued that it is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other. The bourgeoisie or capitalist class is the owners of manufacturing system who reap the profits from the sale of material goods. The proletariat or working class is the non owners of the capital who are forced to exchange their labour for wages paid by the capitalist employers. The relevance of this theory is that, the theory explains the factors such as class, inequality which forced the marginalized individuals who are said to be the majority in Nigeria to exchange their labour for wages, as a result of this makes the labour market in the country highly competitive and eventually lead the majority of them into unemployment.

Looking at the theory discussed, it is clear that unemployment can be explained by different factors depending on individual, location, age, educational background and social class. Unemployment according to the theory discussed, can also be explained based on the ability of the Nigerian government to equip its citizens with



skills that this modern economy required. The researcher here considered conflict theory as the most appropriate theory that can explain unemployment among youth in Nigeria.

Youth, Democracy and Unemployment

Many scholars and practitioners have written and argued about democracy - its nature and characteristics. In many of the monographs and scholarly works-both local and international-democracy has been conceived only in its liberal dimension. In other words, representative democracy is conceived to be the only form or one in which representation is conceived to establish a reliable and effective link between the government and the governed. Many times this is expressed in the notion of an electoral mandate. The focus here has been on representative democracy which implies elections as the source of legitimacy for rulers.

The basic assumptions of liberal democracy are: that governmental decisions are responsible to the needs of the people, that decision making is efficient and based on adequate information and is subject to criticism; and that government is not "systematically" oppressive to individuals. This form of democracy tends to reduce politics to one form only: to the domain of state power. Here politics is identified with political institutions or organizations competing for political powers and or in the distribution of state positions. This is particularly the case in Nigeria today. Hence, all political parties are subordinated to this end and no efforts are made towards fostering a kind of political consciousness and practice among the masses and one which would force the state to be accountable to the people. Thus, the notion of democracy is limited only to state power as well as the relation of governance between the state and the citizen and the division of powers between and amongst the structures of the state and no attempt is made to view democracy as a phenomenon which goes beyond the structures of the state and political power.

It is my concerted view that democracy is not something which needs to be installed once and forgotten. Rather, it is a struggle concept; it is a process and one which needs to be nurtured and made part and parcel of the people's culture. If democracy is to be of any relevancy for the laboring masses, especially the youth, in the present imperialist dominated social formations like Nigeria, we need to go beyond liberal conception of democracy. In other words, democracy needs to be conceived not only in terms of the organizations of the organs of the state and

the manner in which the said organs are related to the citizen, but also we need to conceive the nature of the social relations of production prevailing in the society and their reproduction and the manner in which they impact on the relation between the state and the society itself.

In view of the above scenario, the most important thing in the process of democratization is to re-build the organizational capacity of the masses particularly the youth to become productive as they are the engine of growth of any sensible development. The principal reason for this is mainly one. Ours is a class society: different groups and classes having contradictory and different interests. For example, the most fundamental difference is between those who produce the surplus product and those who do not produce but appropriate surplus product. It is this relation which generates and exacerbates enormous inequalities which ultimately lead to injustice, oppression and exploitation especially among the Nigerian teeming youth which manifested itself in the nature of unemployment and abject poverty.

With the onslaught of the liberation policies of commoditization, marketisation and privatization, and the associated increase in these vices, those who are subjected to those injustices in Nigeria are the youth who are left jobless in the mercies of political gladiators. Since the state is an organ of oppression of one social class over the other, youth as the most powerful groups of people in the society-if left on their own- are likely to become troublesome and hence punctuate the development of their own societies. It is from this background that I view democracy not as a thing outside their which needs to be acquired, but rather, as a process of empowering the laboring masses (the youth) to resist the use as well as abuse of state power.

Youth as Political Thugs

The youth in every society are considered to be the engine of growth. Their contribution is therefore the most needed for a society to thrive and develop in all ramifications. But, as a result of the lingering problem of unemployment bedeviling the youth of today, they have now become a serious threat to the socio-economic and political advancement of the society. They are neglected, marginalized and to some extent abandoned, hence, left to embrace illicit behaviors such as cultism, hooliganism, political violence and other social vices. All of these criminal tendencies among the youth were attributed to the condition of unemployment and neglect by many scholars. However, the youth in Nigeria are now ready made tools to be employed by the politicians to achieve their selfish political



ends. They are being hired to intimidate political opponents, snatch ballot boxes or cause mayhem in political gatherings. These youth are called with different names across the country such as “Yanjagaliya”, “Yankalare”, “Yanshinko”, “Yandaba”, “Yandaukar-Amarya”, “Kauraye”,

“Area Boys”, “Ecomog”, “Bakassi Boys”, “Banu-Israil” among others (Umar, 2015). Many of these youth, as observed by Zango (2015:242) have either no education or only low levels of education. The table below shows the distribution of educational attainment among youth in Nigeria.

Educational Attainment among people aged 15-35 Years in Nigeria

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
No Formal Education	14,035,366	28.06
Nursery	785,481	1.57
Primary	5,966,486	11.93
JSSCE	10,010,147	20.01
SSCE	13,659,339	27.31
OND/NCE	2,944,112	5.89
University Degree/HND	1,988,278	3.98
Post Graduate	273,291	0.55
Others	350,965	0.70
Total	50,013,462	100

NPC (2010) NDHS ED Data (cited in Zango, 2015)

The table indicated that the educational attainment among youth according to 2006 census clearly points to the fact that 28.06% have no formal education; youth with only primary and junior secondary school education constitute 31.94%; youth with senior secondary school certificates are 27.31% and youth with advanced levels of education, University degree and post graduate, 11.12%. It is important at this juncture to note that the Nigerian Ministry of Youth Development recorded that youth cover up to 70% of the entire Nigerian population (NPC, 2009, NMYD, 2012), comparing the handful figure of these youth who are opportune to be schooled in Nigeria one would submit that majority of Nigerian youth are seriously unemployed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian youth are facing myriad of challenges of not only unemployment, but a lot of social and economic problems which are as a result of non applicability of democratic ideals though the government always claimed to have put in place measures of addressing such problems. However, the unemployment challenges linger and increase day by day. These youth are of two categories; those that have either dropped out of schools or those who managed to pass through and completed schools without opportunities to be adequately engaged. They therefore loiter around from dawn to dusk seeking for any kind of opportunity to settle their scores which unfortunately coincided with the unscrupulous Nigerian politicians who find them a useful tool to employ as political thugs of achieving their selfish economic and political interests. Generally speaking, these are people that

are supposed to be useful in the development of the countries nascent democratic experiment but they are left to constitute the nuisance punctuating the development of their dear country despite the fact that they can be utilize to become productive.

It is therefore against this background the paper recommended the following as a solution to the problems challenging Nigerian youth especially in respect of their unemployment debacles:

- That the youth who constitute the largest proportion of Nigerian populace should organize to engage the state constructively through various existing youth organizations to demand for good democratic governance, accountability from both public and political office holders.
- Government and other stakeholders in the Nigerian project should make efforts to minimize unemployment and poverty among the youth especially in the rural areas as it would reduce rural-urban migration which further escalates the rate of crime in the cities for lack of available economic ventures. This can be done through provision of functional education that will equip the youth to be self employed.
- Efforts should also be made to inculcate into the youth to respect for merit, hard work and honesty. This is due to the fact that lack of self value due to extreme poverty and ignorance is counter-productive to democracy.



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